A/65/46/Add.1

United Nations

Report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

Fifty-seventh session
(16-20 August 2010)

General Assembly

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ISSN 0255-1373

Conclusions of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation regarding paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 64/85

A. Background

1. In paragraph 13 of its resolution 64/85, the General Assembly reminded the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation to continue its reflection on how the current, as well as a potentially revised, membership of the Scientific Committee could best support its essential work, including by developing, with the participation of the observer countries,[1] detailed, objective and transparent criteria and indicators to be applied equitably to present and future members alike, and to report its conclusions by the end of June 2010.[2]

2. The Scientific Committee recalled its views expressed in consultations held during its fifty-sixth session, held from 10 to 18 July 2008, and shared with the Assembly, in particular with regard to the size of the Committee[3] and to the principal objective of membership of the Committee and essential elements in this regard.[4]

3. In subsequent consultations with representatives, it was reconfirmed that the Committee, with the participation of the six observer countries (through their scientists designated to attend the fifty-seventh session of the Committee[5]), deemed those elements to be detailed, objective and transparent criteria for deciding how the current, as well as a potentially revised, membership for the Scientific Committee could best support the essential work of the Committee.

B. Report

4. At its fifty-seventh session, the Scientific Committee considered indicators in the context of membership of all States presently members of the Committee and of the six observer countries.

5. Twenty of the 21 current members of the Scientific Committee attended its fifty-seventh session and reaffirmed their commitment to the Committee's work and satisfied the Committee of their fulfilment of the objective of membership.

6. One current member of the Scientific Committee has not made any contribution during the past 10 years.

[1] The observer countries currently are Belarus, Finland, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Spain and Ukraine.

[2] After consideration of a letter from the Chair of the Scientific Committee (A/64/796), the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) recommended that the consideration of the Scientific Committee's report be postponed to the main part of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly (A/64/403/Add.1*).

[3] A/63/478, annex, paras. 2 and 8.

[4] Ibid., para. 6.

[5] See General Assembly resolution 64/85, para. 14.

7. The scientists of the six observer countries attended the fifty-seventh session of the Scientific Committee and confirmed their countries' commitment to the Committee's work.

8. The geographical distribution of the current membership has been accepted, with the appropriate and sufficient mix of the various scientific disciplines required for assessing levels and effects of atomic radiation. The current membership represents what the Scientific Committee considers to be an appropriate size for its efficient method of working. This method depends largely on consensual decision-making among scientists. Any potential additional members should be judged on the basis of the contributions that they can make to the work of the Scientific Committee.

9. As a result of the consultations held, the Scientific Committee considered that the participation of scientists of some of the six countries that have expressed interest in becoming members of the Committee, especially in targeted areas, would be beneficial to the work of the Committee.

10. However, the current members of the Scientific Committee raised concerns with respect to a potentially large increase in membership. Those concerns include: compromised working arrangements and lessened efficiency of the Scientific Committee; the restrictions that would become necessary to limit the size of delegations and therefore limit the depth and breadth of expertise allowed; the increased workload on the secretariat which would likely require a further increase in its staffing (the Scientific Committee noting in this regard that it had taken 10 years to add a single post); and the increased financial requirements for the Committee's operation and functioning in the event of an increased membership.

11. The Scientific Committee has developed ideas for mechanisms to improve its ability to access expertise resident in countries not members of the Committee. These ideas include:

(a) Engagement of experts to assist in developing session documents (such engagement is already open to scientists of all countries);

(b) Invitation of experts as observers, at the Scientific Committee's behest, for specific agenda items (as was done in the period 2001-2008 for the Committee's updated examination of the effects of the Chernobyl accident, using more recent data);

(c) Bilateral arrangements between members of the Scientific Committee and partners in other countries. (Current examples are the inclusion of scientists from the Netherlands in the delegation of Belgium and scientists from the Czech Republic in the delegation of Slovakia. Other such arrangements have existed in the past.)

12. The Scientific Committee proposes the expansion of the mechanisms described in paragraph 11 above on the Committee's own initiative, as a method of accommodating useful contributions from the six observer countries, especially where those contributions supplement and extend the scope of the Committee's expertise.

13. The elected Chair of the Scientific Committee will be available on the occasion of the deliberations on this matter that will take place in New York.

14. The conclusions contained in the present addendum are those of the representatives of the 20 States members of the Committee attending its fifty-seventh session, and are not necessarily the views of the six observer countries.